**Charles D. Blanchette**

**EDC-586 Digital Literacies Institute**

**SEVEN QUESTION REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT**  
  
**Digital Literacies Institute Closing Reflection**  
Please provide a thoughtful and organized response to each question below.Your response may be in writing or it may take the form of a recorded podcast or video commentary. Feel free to be creative! All responses should be posted no later than August 5, 2013 at 5PM.

1. *Describe some of the digital literacies that you learned about this week. What did you know about these topics before the week began and how have this week’s experiences contributed to your understanding of these digital literacies.*

As a teacher with a B.A. in Journalism, and years of experience in Sales/Marketing management, advertising and public relations, I feel I bring a unique mix of perspectives and experience to my understanding of digital literacy. I very clearly remember my Journalism 101 class and Marshall McLuhan’s ***The Media is the Message.*** As such, I have always tried to look at information from multiple perspectives, and as a teacher/professor, have strived to impart that to both my middle school and Providence College students. I have been an active proponent of **geographic literacy**, which I think has become a lost skill/art for many in the modern, industrialized world. People today, though they are consumers of vast amounts of information, do not have discerning palates when it comes to *what* information they consume.

Before this institute, I had never heard of many of the digital tools that were modeled for us in workshops, or, my knowledge of them was cursory at best. I have always felt that using technology was another way to engage the senses of our students to drive deeper understanding.

When I was in sales/marketing, I learned that if one can engage three (3) of the five (5) human senses of your customer, you will have a sale. That’s why at the plastics convention in Chicago at the gigantic McCormick Center, companies lured potential customers and created foot traffic in their expensive display areas by making popcorn, coffee or giving away candy, appetizers and other tasty treats. What does popcorn have to do with injection molding machines? Absolutely nothing. But, as we all know when we go to the movies, the smell of popcorn is intoxicating and the taste is addictive. Color, movies, strong visual displays, touching and hearing the machines operating, or seeing, then feeling the finished product, creates a strong incentive to buy or find out more. Adding what would seem to be the irrelevant sense of smell and/or taste only enhances the number of face-to-face opportunities.

I can readily visualize my students faces when I demonstrate some of the digital tools I’ve learned about and intend to incorporate into my instruction strategies this year. As I articulated in my notes about **Cool Tools**, etc. I know I will use the instructional strategies that Sharon Lux

incorporated into our Diad’s lesson plan. I’ve already contacted my school technology administrator and principal about possibly being part of the Loilo pilot rollout this fall, and have been in touch with Patricia from Loilo. My kids would love using it! I see it being an especially effective tool for my IEP population, most of whom are poor readers. They would be all over it! I really like the fact its so easy to use, very visual, and the kids can readily see the mental map of their thinking process, make revisions, edit, change the sequence of the different elements that lead up to a finished, effective product. Very user-friendly.

1. *Now that you’ve had this professional development experience, how are you defining “digital literacy?”* ***What is your personal perspective on digital literacy*** *and how has your definition changed or evolved this week? Where possible, make specific connections to readings, conversations, presentations, or activities that were especially important to the evolution of your definition of digital literacy.*

As an educator, I see Digital Literacy helping teachers to bring out the creativity and learning potential of all kids by addressing their different learning styles and strengths. If we as a nation, as a world, did a better job of that, think about how many more people on this earth could reach their human potential and lead happy, productive lives, **be better citizens**, and mitigate the differences that lead to conflict. This was one of Renee’s points, which I wholeheartedly agree with.

The digital age does provide a powerful platform for public advocacy. I have been a leading advocate and mentor against bullying and vandalism for the past 10 years. The ability to use social media to drive social change, to rally public support and create awareness, to find like-minded citizens (Local, national & international), and to keep people informed in a way the mainstream media does not, is a very powerful tool for change that we are just beginning to understand how to use it, and how effective it can be. (Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, etc.)

But, I have concerns about the Information Age. How does communicating digitally in the Information Age both positively facilitate **and** negatively impact interpersonal communications? For millions of years, humans have used their 5 senses to interpret the world, and specifically other humans they came into contact with. What happens when we communicate without seeing the other person, reading their body language? What about the tone and inflection of their voice not being heard? How do we explore this new frontier? How do we go where no man has gone, navigating these uncharted waters, before anticipating the opportunities, and the potential problems we will discover as we explore this new, exciting, and threatening paradigm shift in culture? As the Snowden/NSA espionage scandal has demonstrated, what happens when our trust in government, especially one founded on democratic principles of personal liberty, is jeopardized by divulgences of “Big Brother” monitoring every aspect of our daily life?

Just as the Industrial Revolution was a paradigm shift in how humans related and adapted to the physical world around them, so to the digital information age is a paradigm shift, revolutionizing how humans think and act in the 21st Century. I just read where 90% of all data in human history has been collected in just the past few years! We haven’t begun to really understand the possibilities, or the consequences, the digital age will impact humankind.

1. ***How do digital literacies affect the way you think about******academic content****? Describe an example of how some specific academic content is affected by changes in the ways we read, write and think with digital media texts, tools & technologies.*

As a Geography and History teacher/professor, I can readily see how Geographic Information Systems (GIS) is a powerful new tool, reshaping our understanding of the physical world, and allowing us to merge statistical data and spatial data, to not only better understand those relationships historically and in the present, but to create projections of the future. Data clearly shows that in every school district that has incorporated some element of GIS into the curriculum, students’ critical thinking, reading and math scores have improved. Students more readily grasp the relationships between physical location and how it is impacted, or reciprocally, how it impacts people, places, and the environment. For example, using a GIS model to show students how hydrology, soil characteristics, topography, and population density can affect a HAZMAT emergency gives new meaning and relevancy to what previously would be fairly dry subject matter.

In Political Science, GIS allows archaeology to come alive. Changes in neighborhood and voting district demographics over time provide graphic illustrations of a changing city, region, and a changing America.

Rushkoff talked about the use of “big data” being used to predict, in fact create, faux culture, and faux reality. Think about how our political process, really starting with the Clinton Era, had policy and political decisions made based on polling samples and test audiences based on voting demographics. Marshall McLuhan spoke about the “faux village”, a faux “place” consisting of some real, but mostly imaginary characteristics. Star Trek’s the Borg “collective”. “Resistance is futile. You will be assimilated.”

I use an article titled “***The Geography of Nowhere”,*** which illustrates the new digital geography that we exist in. Humans want to know where they are, whether physically or on the Internet. They need to use post-digital skills to “navigate” their way to and from new digital locations, make “mental maps” of these new spaces, and prioritize whether or not they wish to return or possibly find a better more efficient route. How do humans understand this new geographical reality without the need or use of the five senses we’ve spent millions of years adapting and honing? I imagine we will come to be more like a blind or deaf person who learns to adapt to the world around them without one or more senses, which heightens the power of the remaining senses in order to navigate that world successfully. Helen Keller would be a great example of this.

Another geographic connection is that all humans want to belong to a group, want to know who we are. Sherry Turkle states, “…technology not only changes what we do and how we do it, but who we are.” (Video***: Connected, But Alone?)*** Are we part of the Facebook tribe, speak “Tweet”, residents of the .edu region? We’ve long ago changed our thinking on how cash and wealth are moved digitally with ATM cards, on-line banking, E-trade and other brokerage accounts, Bluetooth, and Square instant mobile payment systems.

1. ***How do digital literacies affect teaching practices? What*** *overarching considerations must teachers give, in general, to the interactions of digital literacies and how to teach? Now, focus on your own* ***pedagogical practice****. How will your new understanding of digital literacy affect the way* ***you*** *teach? Describe an example of how you will differently employ a specific teaching practice in your own context as a result of what you learned this week?*

“The flaw in most Socratic, critical, and problem-based approaches

is that the teacher retains control of the inquiry. Students are asked to

generate answers in accordance with their roles as naïve interlocutors, while

the teacher plays Socrates.When the teacher is the one who constructs the

most interesting questions, problems, or critical challenges, students

become dependent upon the teacher to catalyze inquiry.” - (Bowker)

Bowker challenges the long- accepted Socratic method when he states that students should be asking questions rather than regurgitating teachers’/professors’ lecture notes. They should be more like Piaget’s description of children…”little scientists”, exploring and asking questions.

“Not only would they lack practice and confidence in the arts of hypothesizing, inferring, and questioning; worse, they would be likely to see history as little more than a set

of facts, a domain where things were what they were and are what they are,

much as a favorite saying of contemporary Americans goes: “It is what it is.” (Bowker)

Are we in danger of entering a new “Dark Ages”, a time where technology has replaced human initiative and introspective with a mundane acceptance. If the future is in the present, what relevance does time have?

Inquiry-based learning!

“Purposeful inquiry does not happen spontaneously—it must be learned.”

***Questions are designed to probe, to find something***

***that is not already there, to discover relationships***

***and possibilities that are not given.***

“But reducing all ideas to matters of personal opinion is a form of

hyper-individualization, a product of cultural narcissism, and even a step

toward nihilism. If I am locked in my perspective and you are locked in

yours, we can’t communicate; a seemingly benign tolerance here becomes a

curious mix of radical relativism and fundamentalism.” (Bowker)

(Exhibit A: Washington, DC and the Federal Government bureaucracy.)

This cultural narcissism has, I believe, been fostered by several generations of reinforcing misplaced values. The culture of feelings. Everybody gets a trophy whether they actually contributed or excelled. Tolerance and acceptance have become interchangeable, which they are not. If I accept your opinion, it means it has validity, some merit. Tolerating your opinion means I ‘ve heard what you have to say, I weighted its merits…and you don’t know what you’re talking about. The danger of the Internet and digital information, is most people do a “Google” or “Ask.com” query, and even if they ask the right question(s), they take the first couple of sites narrative version as gospel. They’ve “researched” it. Not all opinions are valid an opinion based on an in-depth knowledge, nuanced understanding, or personal expertise/experience should and must supersede an emotional opinion with little or no basis in fact.

Do all people define “renewable energy” the same way? To the poor of southeast Asia, renewable energy means burning biomass (ie, wood, brush, and dried animal dung pats), which leads to environmental degradation, erosion, the spread of chronic lung disease among poor women and children, and he emergence of the ever-expanding environmental disaster known as the “Asian Brown Cloud”. A far cry from what suburbanites in Orange County, CA or Long Island, NY consider “renewable”. If only the poor of India could just flip a switch to cook, light and heat their homes, like we all take for granted.

Take the Trayvon Martin case. Pundits, activists, and the general public all had opinions as to whether George Zimmerman was innocent or guilty. Even after the verdict, a juror came out to the media saying she “felt” he was guilty, BUT the evidence wouldn’t allow them to find him guilty. What?! That’s just like the “shake your head in disbelief” comment (which personally drives my wife crazy) attributed to Fox Sports baseball analyst Tim McCarver…”If that pitch had been over the plate, it would have been a strike.” Huh? Let’s not let the facts get in the way of a good narrative.

IDEA for exit strategy (Formative assessment)- Have each student construct a question they have about the lesson or the information presented by the teacher, or researched. (gradual release) Then, have them share within their respective heterogeneous groups to create discussion or get peers’ help in resolving/answering the question(s). The teacher could also collect the questions randomly and anonymously share with the class.

Teacher: (after reading anonymous questions at random) How many of you had the same or a similar question? Now students see they are not alone, their question(s) validated by others. This inspires confidence that theirs was not a “dumb” question at all. It has merit…VALUE. (cementing learning – to take risk and ask questions)

I know that I have done a very good job getting students to ask questions on some lessons, but clearly have room for improvement in many others. If you recall, I provided you with a copy of the Essential Questions we developed and actively use in the Social Studies Dept. at Feinstein Middle School in Coventry. We all model and refer to these questions routinely, as well as the Five Themes of Geography (Location, Place, Region, Movement, and Human-Environmental Interaction). By inculcating these big ideas, students can then generate their own topical questions specific to the unit we are studying, to create deeper understanding. From the Essential Question “Why do people live where they do?” we get the student query, “Why did the ancient Egyptians settle alone the Nile River?”

Spires speaks about “multimodal literacy”. We use technology for both the teacher to deliver instruction and the students to achieve and demonstrate understanding. As part of our unit on Ancient Egypt, I have student groups conduct an “Interview With The Mummy”. I provided them with a list of a dozen key pharaohs, that a) played a major role in the development of Ancient Egypt, and b) that they can readily find ample quality information about. I provide them with a beginning list of possible websites to research, as well as printed material, but allow them the flexibility to pursue a line of questions about their selected pharaoh that they wish to research further. All the groups must answer some core questions about the pharaoh such as “During what kingdom period (Old, Middle or New) did you reign? What were your 3 greatest accomplishments? Etc. But, then the groups can develop a customized line of questioning that can both teach the class and provide deeper understanding of the significance of this particular pharaoh, and secondly have some fun. “Our viewers want to know what it was like marrying your sister.”

They wrote their own skits, cue cards, created costumes and background, included music and props. Some groups skits were like a presidential news conference complete with podium and press corps. Others had the Oprah, Leno or Ellen Degeneres talk show format. Group members took on the roles of pharaoh, his entourage of wife, children, or slaves, cue card holder, and videographer. I provided the full-scale decorated wooden sarcophagus and King Tut headdress as well as other props. It was hysterical! They loved it. They were so engaged in the whole process. We showed all the videos at the end of the year. They took photos of their groups in costume and posted on Facebook (yes, I broke the school policy). They couldn’t stop talking about it to friends and parents. Their friends were all jealous. So, I guess it was successful.

This is a natural progression from poster board project, to Power Point, to video production.

1. *During the week, you were introduced to* ***several concerns and promising practices*** *around digital literacy, digital pedagogy, social networking, and student voice that are circulating among communities of educators, librarians, and youth media specialists. From your perspective, what promising practices show the most potential? Which specific concerns are most pressing? What key takeaways will you champion in your own work setting(s) so that together, you and your colleagues can (a) implement promising practices and (b) address issues of concern?*

*Consider the list of readings assigned for this course. Briefly summarize 1-2 key insights you gleaned from each cluster of readings (e.g., Digital Literacies in Context, Generating Questions, Instructional Strategies, and Next Steps). How do you see these insights connecting with ideas and experiences shared during the Institute (especially the Keynote and Digging Deeper Sessions)?*

* + *If you are a graduate student, how do these readings connect to ideas in the literature base with which you are engaged?*
  + *If you are a classroom teacher, librarian, or youth media specialist, what connections do you see among the readings themselves and to your experiences during the institute or in your own work setting?*

I liked your example of a “think-aloud” lesson. As I read through it, I realized that’s basically what I had done as I walked through my –inquiry-based lesson using Screencast, demonstrating how I (as a student) was navigating the website [www.nationmaster.com](http://www.nationmaster.com) to research information and statistics that would either support or contradict my initial Agree/Disagree position regarding the statement “The USA is the world’s worst polluter.” By asking students to take a position, it creates student investment.

A teacher’s personal comfort zone when using technology must be considered, or the likelihood of that technology being used again is greatly reduced. (Hiller) In my experience, teachers need and want professional development on how to use technology effectively in the course of best practice. The problem in the past has been:

* When the technology works its great, but when it doesn’t, classroom management, and therefore real student learning, becomes secondary to lost instructional time, behavior issues (especially with ADD/ADHD students with short attention spans), etc. This is exacerbated by the unannounced drop-ins of evaluators as part of the new RIDE teacher evaluation process, be it formal or informal observations.
* Lacking sufficient numbers of working classroom computers/hand-helds, etc.
* One more new learning curve!
* Student Login passwords forgotten or not working
* Scheduling time in the Media Center or Computer lab. In my building, for example, depending on where your main classroom is located, taking a class to the media center or computer lab (including time to and from that location) may take 15-20 minutes of a 55 minute class period. This only gets more complicated with locker/lav times, gym, lunch, and other teachers, especially Electives, demanding students be on time.
* Students having/not having access to technology (or updated technology) in the classroom, but more importantly at home. The technological divide between the haves and the have nots has only worsened during the economic downturn, according to most reports.
* Updating school district technology policies that encourage use, discourage misuse, and are in keeping with CIPA (1998).

The results for the 2012-2013 RIDE Technology Survey given to 8th graders showed the following statistics for the question: ***How often do you use computers in any of your classes at school?***

Several times each week = 30% Several times each month = 40%

Less than one time/month = 22% Never = 8%

Clearly, 30% (22+8) percent of our students lack access to technology, skills, or both. We can also posit that not enough teachers are requiring that students use technology to do schoolwork at home. Again, that could be a function of teachers knowing that a good portion of their student population lacks access so they don’t assign that type of work.

Gaffney states that “there must be an implementation process for teachers to succeed.” There must be a buy-in from all parties/everyone vested in its success. Therein lies my question to Commissioner Gist about the commitment to technology statewide by municipal government leaders and school committees in light of diminished state and federal funding, strained municipal budgets, pension woes, and a very weak Rhode Island economy.

1. *If you had one more day in the Institute, what would you like to learn more about and why? How will you leverage your professional learning network and your new digital literacies to explore your remaining questions over the coming year? Loilo, Screencast, Symbaloo, Google+, Wikipages, etc.*

I would ‘ve liked to have more time to explore best use of **Google+** as a tool for students to access and demonstrate mastery, ala the “merit badge” idea that was demonstrated to us. This reminded me of my mechanics when I was the Sears Automotive Division manager many years ago. Mechanics earned ASE certifications by passing stringent professional standards to be certified to do tune-ups, brake work, etc. You don’t let just any mechanic attempt a tune-up on a $50,000+ BMW, etc.

As I stated earlier, I loved **Loilo** and have begun the process of ascertaining if my team or school can be part of the Ipad pilot launch this fall. That would be exciting and I know my kids would eat it up. If you know of any technology grants avaiilable that we could apply for, please let me know ASAP.

I already have spoken to my SS. Dept head about how we might utilize **Symbaloo** to organize our content lessons, related materials and links more efficiently. I think it could be a great way to help students with organization issues, curate their work and subjects in a fun way. I will bring it to my on-team Special Education teacher. It might be an effective pilot in my building that we could measure results versus other teams’ populations at year end.

**Julie, Thanks so much for a great week. I learned so much and met such great people. You, Renee and the other organizers and presenters did an outstanding job. I concur with my colleagues that this was easily one of the best, if not the very best professional development I’ve attended. I am amped up and ready to kick the tires on some of my newly-learned digital goodie bag this fall. Please let me know if I can be of any assistance. I have already begun putting together an outline for a Rhode Island historical tour for next year’s Institute.**

**Take care and have a great rest of the summer!**

**Sincerely,**

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